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Autobiography - Barbara M. Cameron

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Born May 22, 1954, the eldest of eight in Fort Yates, North Dakota. Raised on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in South Dakota principally by grandparents. Parents and grandparents were cattle ranchers. Grew up in a bilingual environment. Grandfather and father died in 1983.

My grandparents were a strong and steady influence on my life and values. They made me feel that I was someone special and that I was capable of accomplishing anything I wanted.

In my elementary and high school education, I spent a considerable amount of time out of the classroom structure involved with special projects geared toward my grade level. I was far ahead of my classmates academically.

In the ~~ninth~~ eighth grade I won a statewide writing contest sponsored by the Pepsi Company. The prize included one thousand dollars for my school, one thousand dollars for myself and a trip to Washington, D.C. representing South Dakota at the national contest. The theme, "You've Got a Lot to Live", was particularly ironic for me to address because of the limited resources available to me as a then young Indian girl on a reservation.

Although my grandparents provided a positive home environment, the surrounding reservation life was often grim. I grew up believing that I would not live to be 30 years old because I saw so many young Indian people die. At times it was difficult for me to maintain a faith that I would be able to leave the reservation.

I was overjoyed to graduate from high school in my junior year. I then moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico to attend the Institute of American Indian Arts where I majored in photography and film. I was elected to the student council in my first year. During the second year, I was part of the student group who reorganized the faculty and student relationship structure. I was also the primary motivator in the establishment of the media center for the school which housed the newly created photography, film, video and animation departments. I received awards for excellence in the theatre and media arts during

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both years of my attendance at the Institute

The only difficult aspect of my life at the Institute was coming out with my lover as lesbians. It was hard to perservere through the ostracism by one's peers. Yet by mid-year of coming out, an acceptance grew. I was able to maintain a high level of performance in my field despite the stress of homophobic remarks and attitudes.

I moved to San Francisco in 1973, to attend the San Francisco Art Institute. It had been a dream of mine since the age of ten to live in San Francisco after I had read an article in a national magazine about San Francisco. I felt that San Francisco held a future and special place for me.

Although I had visited San Francisco prior to my moving, I was not prepared for the cultural shock I experienced during my first years of living in San Francisco. Many American Indians experience cultural shock when moving to a major urban environment and finding themselves isolated from other Indians. To help ease the cultural shock, I co-founded in 1975, a group for gay American Indians ~~in order~~ to share experiences, provide support for one another and to help make visible third world leadership in the lesbian/gay community.

I have been active in the lesbian/gay community since ~~then~~. I have spoken at numerous rallies and events in the past nine years. At first it was difficult for me to speak in front of thousands of people because I'm essentially a shy and private person. Now I enjoy being able to motivate a mass gathering in the short time generally allotted to speakers.

I have done workshops and seminars at Bay Area universities and colleges on many different issues relevant to my life as an Indian lesbian. I am in three major lesbian/gay books, and was recently published in an anthology of Indian women writers. I not only enjoy a local reputation as a community activist and writer but also have a national presence with the women's and lesbian/gay community.

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My more recent focus is geared toward working within the Democratic Party. I am an officer of the Alice B. Toklas Lesbian/Gay Democratic Club. Of the three lesbian/gay Democratic clubs, I chose Alice to be my primary organization because I believe the club has been able to make a positive and major impact on city politics and therefore represents lesbians and gay men in a thoughtful manner.

My home life includes my lover, our three year old son, four cats and one dog. I have remained with the same employer for five years.

I believe that I have been able to accomplish many things in my 30 years of living and that in general I have a positive impact on my colleagues. I also believe that I will continue to be a responsible citizen in the many communities I belong to.

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